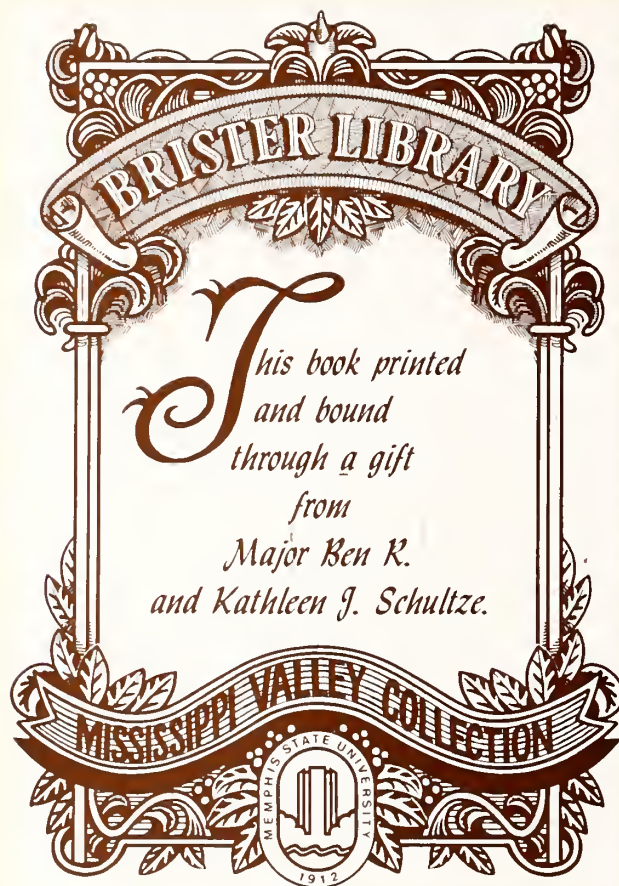


MEMPHIS POLITICS DURING THE CRUMP ERA
INTERVIEW WITH
MRS. NELL ASPERO

BY - S. GLENDA MANESS
TRANSCRIBER: S. GLENDA MANESS
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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"MEMPHIS POLITICS DURING THE CRUMP ERA"

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. NELL ASPERO

MARCH 23, 1989

BY

S. GLENDA MANESS

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ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

"RECOVER POLICE DURING THE CASE"

INTERVIEW WITH MR. J. L. ALLEN

MARCH 22, 1961

75

CLARK COUNTY

CLARK COUNTY, N. CAROLINA

CLARK COUNTY, N. CAROLINA

CLARK COUNTY, N. CAROLINA

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

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That this interview will be used by no one except the interviewee, with no restriction except one copy to be provided to and the interviewer,

Mrs. Nell Aspero, for a period of _____ years without the written consent of both the interviewer and the interviewee. In the event of the death of either of the above mentioned parties during this period of time written consent must be secured from the surviving party. At the expiration of _____ years from this date the interview will become the unrestricted property of Memphis State University unless the period of restriction is extended by the interviewee.

PLACE 7-10 Japan Ave

DATE March 25, 1958

Nell Aspero
(Interviewee)

Glenda Manero

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library of
Memphis State University)

THIS IS TAPE NUMBER TWO OF THE INTERVIEW WITH MRS. NELL ASPERO. THE DATE IS MARCH 23, 1988, AT MRS. ASPERO'S HOME ON FAXON AVENUE IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEWER AND TRANSCRIBER IS S. GLENDA MANESS. THIS IS A PROJECT OF THE ORAL HISTORY DEPARTMENT OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY.

MRS. ASPERO: That's about all there was to the Silver Slipper. A nice big party.

S.G. MANESS: What people were invited to that party?

MRS. ASPERO: The workers for the election. And it was a victory party.

S.G. MANESS: For the...?

MRS. ASPERO: For the workers for the Crump Machine.

S.G. MANESS: And this was in what year?

MRS. ASPERO: Well now I remember specifically the one in 1936.

S.G. MANESS: That was the year that Browning was elected the first time wasn't it?

MRS. ASPERO: I just don't remember. But I remember it was a nice party.

(chuckles) I referred to helping organize the Tennessee Beauticians Association in 1939 and

working for the enactment and drawing the bill that was introduced in the legislature in 1939 to require the beauticians to be licensed and be examined for sanitary reasons. I was in favor of all beauticians having to have a high school education. I had that in my bill but a rival faction rose up called the Cosmetologists and they wanted to have nothing but a grammar school education as their requirement and they hired Mr. Charles M. Bryan who was a very good friend of Mr. Crump's. He was known as "the silver-tongued orator." So they paid Mr. Bryan, a thousand dollars, I recall. He came to Nashville to oppose my bill and he had his counter bill. I felt they were being pretty rough on my people and my bill so I telephoned Mr. Crump from Nashville and told Mr. Crump that they were railroading and not being fair to my people and all I was asking for was fairness. Well, the next morning, Mr. Bryan telephoned me and asked for a conference. Would I come over to the Hermitage? I was staying at the Andrew Jackson Hotel; he was at the Hermitage. So I did. And Mr. Bryan, oh he couldn't have been nicer from then on out.

But the bill did finally pass with only the grammar school education requirement in it. Since that time, it has been upgraded and high school

education--the things that I wanted back in 1939 have been put in since. Mr. Crump, however, was very happy to appoint my candidate that was this lady, Miss Betty Hall Sharp, who was a Christian Science Reader, as the supervisor for West Tennessee.

S.G. MANESS: Supervisor for West Tennessee?

MRS. ASPERO: For the bill. For the enforcement of the beautician's bill.

I remember Prentice Cooper was the governor then. And (laughs) I remember when I was in Nashville going to see Governor Cooper and his telling me, "Yes, you got Mr. Crump putting pressure on me." Governor Cooper was saying that. Well Governor Cooper was independently wealthy and I don't know why he wanted to be governor anyway except I guess it was a feather in his cap.

S.G. MANESS: Why did he say you were having Mr. Crump put pressure on him?

Pressure to do what?

MRS. ASPERO: To pass my bill.

S.G. MANESS: Oh I see. Okay.

MRS. ASPERO: And the governor had a lot to do with it. He had his friends to,--anyway about the next thing that happened that I remember was the big victory that Senator [Estes] Kefauver won and I think that was in the year 1948.

Now that was a tremendous campaign. Estes Kefauver was from Chattanooga and he opposed Mr. Crump's policies. Mr. Crump made the statement that Kefauver was running around over the state like a pet coon. Kefauver replied, "Well, at least I'm not Mr. Crump's pet coon." *

And with that Kefauver adopted a coonskin hat as his

S.G. MANESS: Gimmick.

MRS. ASPERO: Gimmick. And Kefauver won the election as Senator. He had been very friendly to me since then--Senator Kefauver. I remember taking, oh this was about 1955 when he took me and my children to lunch at this restaurant, the Senate Restaurant in Washington.

S.G. MANESS: What did you think of Mr. Kefauver? Did you think he was fair?

MRS. ASPERO: Well he was a United States Senator. I believe that was when old Senator McKellar was still living. Well, I knew Senator McKellar and the Senator was a bachelor. He would come to Memphis and would always stay down at the Hotel Gayoso. His brother was his office manager, Mr. Don McKellar. And, oh, how I remember going to see old Senator McKellar

one time over at the old post office building. He told me that when I was ready to be enrolled in the Supreme Court of the United States, he would be honored to present me to the Supreme Court of the United States which I value very highly because everybody knew Senator Kefauver [McKellar] over the United States. He was the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Well, that's the most powerful committee in congress because nobody could do anything if they couldn't get the money to do it with. And that's what Senator McKellar was in charge of, doling out the money. So when the time came that I went to Washington to be introduced though, Mr. Don McKellar called me and said, "Oh, Miss Sanders, the Senator is not well and I know you wouldn't want him to exert himself and have a heart attack over there in the Supreme Court Building. Let me get Congressman Jennings of Chattanooga to introduce you."

Well, there was nothing I could say but, "Okay." He did. Congressman Jennings introduced me at the Supreme Court of the United States. I think I was the first woman, definitely in Memphis, to ever be enrolled in the Supreme Court of the United States.

Mr. Crump was a very careful dresser and I recall when sport coats first came in. I just

don't remember the date, though, when it was. But I know he had a very beautiful sport coat that they said cost seventy-five dollars. Well, in those days, seventy-five dollars was about like five hundred now. That was a handsome coat. He always wore his hat--the men wore hats in those days. So did the women for that matter--but Mr. Crump wore his hat with the brim flipped down in the back. Gave it a jaunty, on the side and back, sort of a jaunty effect. He usually carried a cane and Mr. Crump gave a big party for a number of years, it seems to me it was along in September, out at the fairgrounds and it was a party to which everybody was invited. Had refreshments. It was just a wonderful party. Mr. Crump would go up and down the midway dressed with his cane swinging and speaking to everybody.

S.G. MANESS: What other members of his organization were you acquainted with?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, I knew about all of them. Abe Waldhauer was one, a lawyer.

S.G. MANESS: What did he do for Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: He was a lawyer.

S.G. MANESS: And a member of the Crump Machine.

MRS. ASPERO: Lee Winchester.

S.G. MANESS: Was he a lawyer?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes, he was a lawyer. Clifford
Pierce was a lawyer. His son is
now the city attorney.

S.G. MANESS: What about Francis Andrews?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes, Francis Andrews was the...
I think he was the County Court
Clerk. He was not a lawyer.

S.G. MANESS: Did you know him?

MRS. ASPERO: I knew Mr. Andrews and Mr.
Rice. Now Mr. Rice. What was
his first name?

S.G. MANESS: Frank Rice.

MRS. ASPERO: Frank Rice. Oh, he was a very
strong member of the Crump
machine.

S.G. MANESS: Right-hand man?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. Frank Rice. I remember
when I was lobbying so hard for
the beauticians' bill, lobbying in the Senate.
Bland Maxwell presided over the Senate. Senator
Bland Maxwell from Memphis. He invited me to come
sit on the platform with him.

S.G. MANESS: This was Mr. Rice or Senator
Maxwell?

MRS. ASPERO: This was Bland Maxwell.

S.G. MANESS: He was a member of the

machine, too.

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. He wouldn't have been up there, [if] he wasn't. Oh, there were so many of them.

S.G. MANESS: Did you ever talk to Mr. Rice?

MRS. ASPERO: Well I met him but I never had any business directly with Frank Rice. Now I visited Mr. Crump on several occasions in his office in the North Memphis Savings Bank Building it was called then.

S.G. MANESS: Was this as social calls or business?

MRS. ASPERO: Business. I've forgotten now what. Probably something about the beauticians if it was in that time. But Mr. Crump was always very cordial, very much the gentleman. He had lemonade in his watercooler. [He] always served me a glass of lemonade and he had lemonade for everybody in the office. He believed you ought to drink lemonade.

S.G. MANESS: Why was this?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't know. He thought it was most healthful. Now Mr. Crump was most interested in his health. I've forgotten how old he was when he died. I think he died in 1954. But Mr. Crump would talk and reminisce about Holly Springs--that was where his

youth was spent--and his mother. I remember one time he told me about the awful Yellow Fever epidemic of 1878. And he said, "It was called the Black Vomit. That's not very nice to talk about." But that's what it was called in those days. The Black Vomit. I read some medical thing not too long ago and it said that those who were afflicted with Yellow Fever would vomit and it would be black.

S.G. MANESS: And he saw all this.

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. When he was a child at his mother's home. The Crump family was a very good family down there in Holly Springs. [They] had a beautiful home. I've seen it many times. Now, my husband [laughs]--this I know you'll be interested in--my husband was one of the first to oppose Mr. Crump's candidates for election.

S.G. MANESS: Who were they?

MRS. ASPERO: Well he opposed Chancellor Lois Bejach. Chancellor Bejach had been Mr. Crump's attorney and Mr. Crump appointed him to the bench. The Chancellor would go to sleep on the bench. He would pick his nose on the bench. He would read the newspaper. He would read his mail on the bench. He was a brilliant man. Oh, the main thing he would brag about was being a

graduate of Harvard Law School. But he would do a lot of things that really certainly were not proper. And my husband didn't have anything against Mr. Crump personally but he believed the system was completely wrong. Now my husband was from Worcester, Massachusetts. He had a brother who was in the state legislature of Massachusetts. And to this good day [laughs], Mr. Aspero still thinks the Crump regime was terrible. And he was a good friend of Mr. Ben Cohn's that I talked about. I told him--and he said, "Now, you're going to talk about Mr. Cohn, aren't you? And I said, "Now, I didn't know personally about Mr. Cohn being beaten up."

And Mr. Aspero said--- Oh, it was in all the newspapers. Well, at any rate, Mr. Aspero says in 1950 that he was going to run against Chancellor Bejach because Chancellor Bejach had irritated so many people and he'd--I did research on his appellate record. Oh, it was the hot summertime and I was pregnant with this child who went out the door [indicates Tony, Jr.]. 1950. I had actual figures and they were published in the newspaper, too, about how many times Chancellor Bejach had been reversed on appeal. Now, some thinking people paid attention to that but by and large, the Crump Machine defeated Mr. Aspero.

He received one-third of the votes and that, in those days, was a miraculous thing.

S.G. MANESS: And you weren't upset that Mr. Aspero...

MRS. ASPERO: I was upset at the whole thing 'cause it had cost a lot of money. Of course, people had contributed but we had spent money and time and effort and I had written press release after press release.

S.G. MANESS: Had you actually talked to Mr. Crump about this?

MRS. ASPERO: No. No! And Mr. Crump, of course, was furious about it and all the people supporting Crump. And [laughs], Mr. Aspero had bought a loudspeaker. Had it mounted on top of an Oldsmobile that we had at that time. And he would cruise around the downtown area, talking about the Crump Machine and how to do away with the Crump Machine. And he would go to [laughs]--now, that was before there was much air conditioning and the courthouse windows were all open and some of the clerks at the courthouse told him--now Mrs. M.V. Smith was a great--she was a divorce lawyer, nothing but divorces. Mrs. Smith supported Mr. Crump and she came tearing into the Circuit Court Clerk's office at the courthouse one day and said, "We got to get to work. Aspero's

going to win this election. He cruises all around town with this loud thing going on against Mr. Crump. He's going to win." [laughs]

So I guess they did double their efforts, then, to defeat Mr. Aspero.

S.G. MANESS: What was Mrs. Smith's name?

MRS. ASPERO: Mrs. M.V. She always went by Madelene something. Mrs. Smith was a very tall woman and always wore big hats. She'll be remembered to this good day about wearing big hats.

S.G. MANESS: Her job was...

MRS. ASPERO: She was a lawyer. Divorce lawyer. Nothing but divorces.

S.G. MANESS: Were any women considered part of the Crump Machine?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, Mr. Crump--this was before Mr. Aspero got into the picture [laughs]--he was grooming me to take Judge Camille Kelly's case as the Juvenile Court Judge. But I didn't want to be Juvenile Court Judge because Judge Kelly ran that court in a manner that I did not think was proper--she would start court at two o'clock in the afternoon and continue until seven or eight at night. I didn't want that kind of life. Besides I was making good money practicing law and I just didn't--I was a real good

friend of Judge Kelly's. Her little girl, who died of diphtheria--Judge Kelly was a Christian Scientist--and she didn't have the doctor to Evelyn until poor little Evelyn was just practically dead. But little Evelyn and I played together. We were good friends over at Snowden and Judge Kelly just lived over here on Curruthers. But, nevertheless, I didn't want to be Juvenile Court Judge. I have served as a special judge of General Sessions Court. But I never did aspire to be a judge.

S.G. MANESS: And he was going to appoint you judge before Mr. Aspero ran?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. Yes. But, anyway, after Mr. Aspero was defeated, oh, that was a primary, no, it was the general election for the Chancellor. Those were the days before voting machines and I remember some of our neighbors served as watchers at the polls to be sure the votes were counted properly and served until 2:00 in the morning, watching.

S.G. MANESS: I guess they were afraid Crump would count them wrong.

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. I know they were such good friends of ours, they served until 2:00 in the morning watching the counting of the ballots. And the ballots were

counted properly but, as I said, Mr. Aspero got about a third of the votes which was phenomenal in those days.

S.G. MANESS: This was what year?

MRS. ASPERO: Nineteen-fifty. Because he was the first one to buck the Crump Machine which distressed me greatly because I was a friend of Mr. Crump's. [laughs] But I have to admit, the...

S.G. MANESS: But you totally backed Mr. Aspero in this. You backed him?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, yes, I helped him. He wanted to be elected and so, as I said, I ground out press releases, dictated press releases and sent them to the newspapers.

S.G. MANESS: What was your relationship with Mr. Crump during this period?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't recall having anything to say to Mr. Crump one way or the other. There was a group running against Mr. Crump's candidates. I know Raymond Briggs was running for Attorney General. Well, he wasn't elected, either. Nobody got elected of that much, that was too early--1950.

S.G. MANESS: That was right before his influence disintegrated.

MRS. ASPERO: I wouldn't ever say his influence ever disintegrated until after his death. As I remember, Mr. Crump died in 1954. I think that was the great date. He had a long funeral list and his funeral was at his home over on Peabody. And there was a vacant lot, which was part of Mr. Crump's property, a garden sort of, and we stood out in the lot for the funeral service. And then there was a tremendously long funeral procession to Elmwood where the family was buried. He had a tall shaft with Crump on it.

S.G. MANESS: Is that where his monument is?

MRS. ASPERO: In Elmwood Cemetery. But I almost forgot to say this.

Before Mr. Crump became ill, now, this must have been in 1954 because I think he died in the summer or in the fall, Mr. Aspero said that he was going to the courthouse one day and Mr. Crump and some men were talking on the street. And he [Mr. Aspero] spoke to Mr. Crump. Now, men tipped their hats to Mr. Crump in that day but Mr. Crump did not speak to Mr. Aspero. Well, that was in about the middle of the week. Sunday night of that week, Mr. Crump telephoned me and apologized for not speaking to my husband. Now mind you, my husband had opposed him and caused him a lot of trouble but Mr. Crump said, "I know you have always been my friend.

Your mother was always my friend and I want to apologize for not speaking to your husband."

S.G. MANESS: But he never apologized to Mr. Aspero?

MRS. ASPERO: No. He didn't ask to speak to Mr. Aspero, he ask to speak to me because I was the one who had been his friend.

S.G. MANESS: But he had not insulted you.

MRS. ASPERO: In effect he was apologizing to Mr. Aspero when he apologized to me.

S.G. MANESS: How did Mr. Aspero feel about it?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't think it bothered Mr. Aspero.

S.G. MANESS: He accepted it?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. Because Mr. Aspero didn't like him anyway. Mr. Aspero had that Massachusetts feeling that the whole Crump Machine was wrong. In those days, there was the Pendergast Machine of Kansas City that was a notorious machine.

S.G. MANESS: He was a big city boss.

MRS. ASPERO: Umhum. City boss. And Mr. Crump was included in that line. I don't recall any other but I remember when Senator Kefauver won, we were visiting in New

Jersey. I think it was 1948. There were great, big black headlines in the New Jersey newspapers that it was such a tremendous victory for Kefauver to win over the Crump forces. And that was the beginning of the break, really. But that was across the state, not in the county of Shelby.

S.G. MANESS: Do you think his opposition to Browning started this?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, that was a bad thing. But Mr. Crump prevailed in that.

S.G. MANESS: That was pretty controversial. Do you think that might have been the beginning and then the Kefauver thing?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. [pause] Yes, Browning was from--where was Browning from-- I think it was somewhere up in Carroll County, a rural county. Kefauver, though, was from Chattanooga, Hamilton County. Over the state--of course, there had been Senator [Tom] Stewart. I believe it might have been Senator Stewart that Kefauver defeated and won the senatorial seat.

S.G. MANESS: And Crump backed the other one.

MRS. ASPERO: I know Senator McKellar kept running. And Senator McKellar, as well as I recall, was in his nineties. The last election, I can't remember offhand who defeated

Senator McKellar. I don't think it was Gore. But, anyway, they had a bus, an air-conditioned--now, mind you, air-conditioning was scarce in those days--but they had an air-conditioned bus to haul Senator McKellar all over the state and Senator McKellar could still make his speeches. Senator McKellar was really a very remarkable old gentleman. And he did a great deal for Tennessee. A great deal. I don't know how many terms he did serve. But he was too old to be sent back. Poor old thing. He was willing to go. And Mr. Crump wanted him to go.

S.G. MANESS: But Roosevelt didn't.

MRS. ASPERO: No, I think he was a Democrat. I think Senator McKellar always supported President Roosevelt and his New Deal.

S.G. MANESS: I think it was Gore.

MRS. ASPERO: Was it Gore?

S.G. MANESS: I think so. 1951. Was it 1951?*

MRS. ASPERO: It could have been because that was three years before Mr. Crump died.

S.G. MANESS: Nineteen, fifty-two, maybe. '51 or 52.

MRS. ASPERO: It was along in there. You say it was Gore?

S.G. MANESS: I think it was.

MRS. ASPERO: I remember taking the children
to a rally in Court Square.
Nowadays, they don't have rallies. They do it all
on TV when you sit in your living room and look at
it in the cool of the living room. In those days,
the rally was the big thing. I remember Sheriff
Oliver Perry lived in this ward. I remember going
to a big rally at his home.

S.G. MANESS: Oliver Perry?

MRS. ASPERO: Perry. With watermelons served
and...

S.G. MANESS: I think we need to turn the
tape.

[SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

MRS. ASPERO: What was I about to say?

S.G. MANESS: Sheriff Oliver Perry held a
rally at his home.

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. Rally. Oh, they were
having rallies were big things
and they would always have nice food, coca colas.
Mr. Crump believed in serving good refreshments to
everybody. Oliver Perry served as sheriff for a
number of years. Sheriff is a big job in Shelby
County. It's usually much sought after. I don't
know what the salary is now but it's top salary.
The County Sheriff.

S.G. MANESS: Did you know Will Gerber?

MRS. ASPERO: Oh yes! General Gerber! He was Attorney General of Shelby County. I liked General Gerber and General Gerber and I were good friends and Miss Birdie Jaffee. Miss Jaffee was General Gerber's secretary for so many, many years. [She] was a devoted friend of mine and of my family. In fact, she'd send fancy bread home by Mr. Aspero for us if he'd be over there in the Criminal Court Building. When Tony, Jr. was in the fifth grade at Snowden--I think it was the fifth grade--, they had a United Nations Day and he was dressed as the King of Togo Land, as I recall. [He] had a little leopard cap on his head and a long robe. I remember tipping the Press Scimitar off that these children were going to be dressed in costumes and so they sent a photographer out and, it came out on the front page of the Press Scimitar. Well, Miss Jaffee had the Press Scimitar give her a photo. She had it made up and had it framed and sent that to us because she was proud of Tony, Jr. Miss Jaffee was a marvelous little woman and so very, very efficient. She's dead now.

S.G. MANESS: This was his [Will Gerber's] secretary.

MRS. ASPERO: She was secretary to General Gerber. And General Gerber was

very much my friend and I think Mr. Aspero's friend. I remember going to a big dinner party that the bar association had--Memphis and Shelby County Bar Association--in the fall of the year down at the Peabody. I remember that it was in the Continental Ballroom, which was decorated with red roses, and how well General Gerber presided. I know Hal, his son, but not well. I don't feel I know Hal nearly as well as I knew the General.

S.G. MANESS: Mr. Will was next in line to Mr. Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, he was a very strong supporter and Mr. Crump relied on General Will Gerber. Mr. Crump relied on Will Gerber, Frank Rice, Paul Barrett out in the county--who else in Memphis,--Charles Crabtree was a lawyer. Of course, they're all dead, now.

S.G. MANESS: Why did he [Mr. Crump] not name a successor? He promised a number of people that they would become the machine--the political power and he told several--I've read that he told several--that they would be the new boss but, he really didn't. He just wanted to make them all happy...

MRS. ASPERO: Yes.

S.G. MANESS: ...There was no strong man when he died.

MRS. ASPERO: There was no strong man when he died. And when he died then various factions began disagreeing and...

S.G. MANESS: What about the boys? Did he not...

MRS. ASPERO: They [the Crump boys] were in the insurance business.

S.G. MANESS: They didn't want to be in politics.

MRS. ASPERO: Evidently not.

S.G. MANESS: He did not want them in politics?

MRS. ASPERO: Evidently not. And they were not lawyers. Mr. Crump was not a lawyer. But Edmund Orgill opposed Mr. Crump and he became Mayor of Memphis. Edmund Orgill, after Mr. Crump's death.

S.G. MANESS: Was he in a political faction before Crump's death or...

MRS. ASPERO: I don't recall that he was.

 But there was a faction. Lucius Burch opposed Mr. Crump and Jimmy Blount, Jr. And Mr. Aspero used to confer. He [Mr. Aspero] was a lawyer. He opposed Mr. Crump.

S.G. MANESS: And the three of them could not defeat--wrest the power from him?

MRS. ASPERO: Well. [contemplates the question but does not answer immediately]

S.G. MANESS: Do you believe that he could have groomed a successor to take over? Do you think he was that powerful [in the last days], if he had wanted to.?

MRS. ASPERO: I think he could have.

S.G. MANESS: He didn't want to?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, I think maybe Mr. Crump thought it was not wise to designate one person. I believe that was his reasoning. Now, my husband never opposed Mr. Crump openly. He never ran for office again. I told him he better not ever run for office again, for that was too harrowing an experience. And a costly experience. You don't run for office and not spend money. And it distressed me a great deal. Naturally, I did not like Chancellor Bejach. I just thought he was a disgrace to the Bench. But, he stayed on the bench. Oh yes, they did send him up to the Court of Appeals so we got rid of him here in Shelby County. He was up in Jackson holding court. I think he behaved pretty well up in Jackson. Of course, he's been dead a long time.

S.G. MANESS: Was his successor also a Crump person?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't remember who the suc-

cessor was. I think the
chancellors and judges--there hasn't been that
Crump feeling since Mr. Crump died, you see. And I
think that was in 1954.

S.G. MANESS: Yes.

MRS. ASPERO: I'll never forget that funeral
procession and that funeral
because that lot--I think it was two lots that
formed this garden--were just packed. The whole
city grieved.

S.G. MANESS: Who was the most powerful of
the black leaders?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, Bob Church was a Repub-
lican and he controlled the
Republican patronage. Now his daughter was Roberta
Church and she held a very high, a federal job,--I
don't know just what it was--in Washington. She's
retired now. A very fine woman--well-educated.
Bob Church was wealthy. His children were well-
educated.

S.G. MANESS: What happened to him? What
happened to him for opposing
Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't know of anything. He
was Republican and see, Mr.
Crump sort of acknowledged that there were two
parties. Now, Mr. Crump was a Democrat.

S.G. MANESS: It was reported that the Church home burned at the hands of Crump people.

MRS. ASPERO: I don't know. I never heard that. Bob Church's home?

S.G. MANESS: [Nods affirmative.]

MRS. ASPERO: I don't know. Other black leaders...

S.G. MANESS: What about the black leaders who supported him?

MRS. ASPERO: Well now, I'm trying to think of the black doctor [who] was the president of the Universal Life Insurance Company. Now, what was his name? Anyway, he wanted to be the Governor General of the Virgin Islands. The Virgin Islands was almost entirely composed of black citizens but he told Dr. Erwin-- he told me that Mr. Crump said, "No." He couldn't appoint him to that position because there were a few whites over there. It wouldn't do to have a black Governor General when there were some whites under him. See, the whole feeling has changed. Maybe not the feeling, because some of us who are way up in years, we still don't like the attitude of the blacks nowadays. But, ever since Martin Luther King was killed, assassinated, there's been a gradual increase in the influence of the blacks.

Of course the Fair Labor Standards Act came in in 1938 during President Roosevelt's administration. President Roosevelt wanted to improve the social conditions. The Fair Labor Standards Act began with a very low minimum wage. I forget what it was. My husband handled a number of those cases against the Nicky Lumber Company and the Home Ice Company for paying their workers a wage that was underneath the Fair Labor Standards Act legal requirements. I know we had cases against Nicky where they were paying them what averaged out to twelve and a half cents an hour. And I've forgotten what the requirement was in those days, at least twenty-five cents for forty hours a week.

S.G. MANESS: Was Dr. Ervin a black physician?

MRS. ASPERO: He was a black physician and he had, I think maybe had some insurance company in Mississippi and consolidated the stock of that insurance company with this Universal Life. I don't remember the details but anyway, he became the president of the Universal Life. I knew him. Oh the vice-president of that insurance company was in my office--his wife was a client of mine--the vice-president, what was his name? I handled his estate. Ooh, I've forgotten

how much the funeral bill was. They had a bronze casket. They had flower girls carrying flowers. The most enormous funeral you ever heard of.

S.G. MANESS: He was also a Crump supporter?

MRS. ASPERO: No, I don't know that he was.

S.G. MANESS: Were any of the blacks actually a part of the organization?

MRS. ASPERO: I'm trying to think--Maceo Walker. That old man's name was not Ervin, it was Walker.

S.G. MANESS: Dr. Walker.

MRS. ASPERO: Dr. Walker. Dr. J.E. Walker.

And his son was Maceo Walker. And Maceo Walker and this man who was vice president of the insurance company, whose wife was my client. I know they came to my office for me to advise them on some point of law and I remember the vice president had a terrible cough and my aunt insisted that I keep a beautiful walnut covered jug of ice water on a little shelf. And I always had two glasses and I gave him a glass of water. Well that was not the thing to do in those days. You didn't invite the black to drink out of any glass that was going to be used.

S.G. MANESS: Why?

MRS. ASPERO: Sanitary reasons.

S.G. MANESS: They carried disease and germs?

MRS. ASPERO: Yeah and he was that high class man--Stewart was his name. Now what was his first name? His wife's name was Evelyn. She had a grocery store. [She] had me as her lawyer for years and years. I was a lawyer also for a black gynecologist. But he didn't take any part in politics.

S.G. MANESS: Would you say that Walker was on the outside of the machine or just used by the machine or...

MRS. ASPERO: No. And Doctor Walker himself told me about wanting to be the Governor General of the Virgin Islands and Mr. Crump said he couldn't recommend him.

S.G. MANESS: But he was still one of Crump's ...

MRS. ASPERO: I think he was a lieutenant. Yes.

S.G. MANESS: ...lieutenants.

MRS. ASPERO: I don't know any of the blacks who opposed Mr. Crump except

S.G. MANESS: Church.

MRS. ASPERO: Bob Church. And that was because he was a Republican. And he did control all of the patronage. I remember a lawyer that he got appointed District Attorney. Lindsey Phillips.

S.G. MANESS: That was Mr. Church?

MRS. ASPERO: That was Bob Church when he controlled the patronage. See he gave the federal jobs out. I forget whose administration that was. Maybe Hoover. Maybe later than Hoover. I don't think there's been a Republican president along in that era.

S.G. MANESS: The blacks lived in Southaven--that area at that time.

MRS. ASPERO: Not Southaven. That's in Mississippi. But as the white's became more and more affluent and moved out of South Memphis, the blacks bought up the property and moved into South Memphis.

S.G. MANESS: In the fifties, where were they living?

MRS. ASPERO: What was that?

S.G. MANESS: In the fifties, where were they living? In the forties and fifties?

MRS. ASPERO: They were living in South Memphis. The whites had moved on to the east and further east.

S.G. MANESS: In the forties?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. And kept going farther east, you see.

S.G. MANESS: So these lieutenants [black]

were from these precincts down there. Do you remember any more of Crump's lieutenant's from those areas?

MRS. ASPERO: You mean from the south? No.

S.G. MANESS: Yes. Black lieutenants. People who worked with him.

MRS. ASPERO: I just don't remember anything about the blacks much.

S.G. MANESS: What about relations with clubs and organizations, the churches?

MRS. ASPERO: Oh the churches. The black churches supported my husband in his campaign. Invited him to come and speak in many of the churches.

S.G. MANESS: Did most churches support Mr. Crump? Did he visit the black churches?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't recall ever hearing of Mr. Crump's ever visiting black churches.

S.G. MANESS: Was he against Jews and other minorities?

MRS. ASPERO: No, because he had some of the Jewish people in his close...

S.G. MANESS: Gerber?

MRS. ASPERO: Gerber. And Abe Waldauer was Jewish. And probably some

others. I don't recall. But Mr. Crump had Jewish people as friends of his.

S.G. MANESS: Did he visit the women's clubs?
Did he do anything for them?
Did he start the City Beautiful Commission?

MRS. ASPERO: That was Mrs. W.B. Fowler who started the City Beautiful Commission. And Mrs. Fowler was the wife of the city engineer. He was a widower and had children by his first marriage and married Margaret--I forget her name--Fowler. Anyway, she was very gracious, lovely lady and a friend of my mother's and mine. I had her as a patroness of Phi Delta Sorority, I remember. She established the City Beautiful Commission and made a big thing out of it. And it really accomplished a great deal in beautifying Memphis. And Mr. Crump helped her. She was a good friend of Mr. Crump's.

S.G. MANESS: Do you know what year that was when they first started organizing for that?

MRS. ASPERO: I would say in the neighborhood of 1940. I remember very well the Fowler home. They lived in a big house over at Jefferson and Bellevue. The daughters were friends of mine. Mr. Fowler was a very fine man and a fine city engineer.

S.G. MANESS: Did Mr. Crump belong to the American Legion or work with with the American Legion?

MRS. ASPERO: I'm sure he did because the Legion was a big organization in those days. Now I don't think I ever heard whether Mr. Crump was a Mason. But, in those days, most of the leading men were Masons, members of the Masonic Order. I imagine Mr. Crump was. Later than that, you know, the luncheon clubs came into prominence: the Rotary and Kiwanis and Civitan. While the Masonic organizations still retained their prestige, their membership was not as large as it had been formally because the men were going off to these luncheon clubs, Kiwanis and Rotary and things?

S.G. MANESS: Was Mr. Crump very active in these other clubs?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't recall that he was active in any of the clubs. I don't recall. He was a member of--I think it was the Moon Lake Hunting Club down in Mississippi, and I think Mr. Crump was an Episcopalian. I think they had their Episcopal service at his funeral. I don't really think Mr. Crump was very active in any church. His wife was.

S.G. MANESS: Do you think he considered him-

self interdenominational?

MRS. ASPERO: More or less. Now, Mr. Crump was very anxious for the poor of the city to be taken care of well, and he supported the--what did they call it in those days--organizations that would get the baskets out at Christmas.

S.G. MANESS: Do you remember the annual excursions on the river for the blind?

MRS. ASPERO: Oh, yes, yes. Mr. Crump would load everybody up and take off up the river.

S.G. MANESS: Did he take the blind and all the handicapped or just the blind on these trips?

MRS. ASPERO: Everybody. I remember the football games.

S.G. MANESS: The Blind football games.

Mrs. Aspero: He was the one who inaugurated those football games for the benefit of the blind.

S.G. MANESS: Did you attend some of them?

MRS. ASPERO: Well I never was very fond of football, and I didn't go to football games until my son got to playing football but, that was after Mr. Crump got the Blind thing

started. Now Mr. Crump's control of the city schools was a very sore spot. Superintendent R.L. Jones was a superintendent. He had been President of the Middle Tennessee Teachers College at Murfreesboro. And then, I forget what governor had appointed him Commissioner of Education for the State. And I think his predecessor was Wharton S. Jones. I can remember old Mr. Wharton S. Jones visiting Snowden wearing a cut-away coat and striped trousers. But Mr. R.L. Jones, Superintendent R.L. Jones, was six feet, four. Big man. And a big man in every way.

S.G. MANESS: And he opposed Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: Yes. And he--Mr. Crump little by little--wanted to get control of the school and all the teachers. The votes, just think of the votes.

S.G. MANESS: Just for the votes, not for the good of the kids?

MRS. ASPERO: Well, yes, I guess for the good of the kids, too. But Superintendent Jones didn't think it should be done, Superintendent R.L. Jones.

S.G. MANESS: How did he go about trying to get control of the schools? What did he do? What procedure?

MRS. ASPERO: I don't know just exactly, but

he put Ernest Ball in the job of Business, I think his title was Business Agent of the City Schools. Ernest Ball wanted to be superintendent.

S.G. MANESS: He did become superintendent, didn't he?

MRS. ASPERO: Ernest Ball conceived the idea of having Crump Stadium and naming it Crump Stadium. It had been the football field of Central High [School] and the general playground for the parades and everything that the students wanted. I can remember that.

S.G. MANESS: And so by doing this, Ball was assured of the superintendency.

MRS. ASPERO: So--yes, naming it for Mr. Crump. That was the big idea when Superintendent Jones frowned on that.

S.G. MANESS: How was the superintendent elected? Or appointed? Was he appointed or elected by the people or county commission?

MRS. ASPERO: You know, I believe he was appointed like Herenton. How did he get his job? Making that enormous salary. Well, you know, I belong to the old school and, I frown on blacks taking such a prominent part. I can't help that. That's just part of the way I was

brought up. Of course I think Herenton has made a very good superintendent. But, my goodness, to think that we paid taxes, now.

S.G. MANESS: Did R.L.--I suppose that it was not long after this that he was out.

MRS. ASPERO: Mr. R.L. Jones developed diabetes. And he had a chauffeur who was very devoted to taking care of him and he continued to serve for a long time. I think he went to some big convention of the National Education Association or something and a faucet or hot water--he didn't have any feeling in one of his feet--and his foot was scalded and, I think, had to be amputated. So that left the road pretty well opened for Mr. Ernest Ball. And he kept needling Mr. Jones until, finally, Mr. Jones gave up and stayed at home. Ernest was the acting superintendent for a good long time and then he took over. In those days, of course, there were schools for the colored and, schools for the white. And they were equal. They were separate but equal. I think it was in 1954 that this case of Brown, it was case from Kansas that went to the Supreme Court of the United States.

S.G. MANESS: The case of Brown v. the Board of Education.

MRS. ASPERO: Brown v. the Board of Education
 that declared that the blacks
must not think that they were second-class citizens
and they must go to school with the whites. [It
has been] going on ever since until where there are
very few whites who attend the public schools and
yet our tax money goes to support the public
schools. And the vast majority of the white
parents pay tuition to private schools.

S.G. MANESS: Did Mr. Crump keep the city
clean? What about sanitation?

MRS. ASPERO: Oh yes. Mr. Crump believed in
everything good. Now he really
wanted things to be proper. Now I don't know
whether he knew about Paul Barrett hauling those
blacks to [laughs] to the voting place. But, if he
did, I guess he thought there wasn't any harm in
it. After all, nobody was running against Mr.
Crump to amount to anything. There was very little
opposition to him.

S.G. MANESS: How did he work with the police
department? Did he control the
police department?

MRS. ASPERO: Well he controlled them in a
way. Now, Cliff Davis was a
Commissioner of Police and Cliff Davis was the
Police Court Judge. And then, he was sent to

Congress.

S.G. MANESS: Did you ever meet "Holy Joe" Boyle?

MRS. ASPERO: Oh yes. Mr. Joe Boyle. I forget why he was called "Holy Joe."

S.G. MANESS: Well, he cleaned up the saloons under Crump's orders.

MRS. ASPERO: And those were the days for the blue laws. Weren't supposed to have anything to make money on Sundays. And I remember, they weren't supposed to operate the movie houses on Sunday, but the Orpheum had sandwiches to sell and, you could go down and buy your sandwich and go in and see the movie free. That's the way they got around that.

S.G. MANESS: Was that Mr. Crump?

MRS. ASPERO: No, I don't know that Mr. Crump had anything to do with that. I guess he tolerated it but, I don't know [tape ends Mrs. Aspero continues] whose brilliant idea that was.





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